

## Introduction



Tacitus' employment of poetic language in the *Annales* has long been recognized. More than a century, in fact, has passed since Friederich Leo pronounced Tacitus one of the few great poets that the Romans had ever possessed. Leo, moreover, maintained that the historiography of the *Annales* could be appreciated properly only if it were understood in terms of poetry in general, and tragic poetry in particular, an assessment of Tacitus' historiography about which Syme only hints.<sup>1</sup> Since Leo, a number of scholars, including Löfstedt,<sup>2</sup> Norden,<sup>3</sup> Mendell,<sup>4</sup> and Leeman,<sup>5</sup> have enumerated sundry tragic techniques with which Tacitus heightens the dramatic impact of the *Annales*.<sup>6</sup> The latest studies in this long scholarly tradition, including those of Betensky,<sup>7</sup> Malissard,<sup>8</sup> Woodman,<sup>9</sup> and Bartsch, deal with theatrical self-reference. The last scholar, in fact, judges Tacitus' portrayal of the reign of Nero to be one spectacular theatrical metaphor.<sup>10</sup> But despite the widespread assessments of Tacitus' genius for theater in general and tragic poetry in particular,<sup>11</sup> only Woodman, in his analysis of Tacitus' narration of the Pisonian conspiracy, has given careful attention to the historian's use of specific language patterns to evoke tragedy.<sup>12</sup> In the chapters that follow, we seek to complement the long scholarly tradition from Leo to Woodman by investigating the connotative and thematic range of Tacitus' recurrent vocabulary and imagery.

Tacitus employs all manner of rhetorical and poetical coloring in the *Annales*, including the use of Graecisms and Latin archaisms. He likewise alludes to prose authors such as Cicero, Sallust, and Livy and to poets such as

Vergil, Horace, Ovid, and Seneca.<sup>13</sup> Reference to drama in general and tragedy in particular is only one aspect of Tacitus' multifarious rhetorical methods. Nevertheless, because so many scholars have remarked upon features of Tacitus' dramatic technique in the *Annales*, and because relatively little attention has been given to the recurrent vocabulary and allusive imagery with which Tacitus achieves his dramatic effect, this book concentrates upon that aspect of his historical methods.

Tacitus' historiography is a product of Silver Age rhetoric, which blurs the boundaries not only between prose and poetry but also between history and tragedy.<sup>14</sup> Segal, for example, remarks upon the affinity between history and poetry and warns against an "arbitrary" and "misleading" division between the two when evaluating ancient literature, especially in respect to Tacitus' multivalent diction, the meaning of which "opens the narrative to several different levels of significance."<sup>15</sup> Segal's observations find corroboration in the remarks of Quintilian, who, noting the fusion between literary genres, comments on the special affinity between poetry and history, which he considers a poem in prose (Quint. *Inst. Orat.* 10.1.31).<sup>16</sup> The rhetorician also envisions a similar amalgamation between oratory and tragedy (*Inst. Orat.* 10.1.66–68), just as Cicero did before him (*De Orat.* 3.27).<sup>17</sup> Since rhetoric serves as the foundation for Roman historical prose, awareness of such relationships sheds light on the historiography of Tacitus, whose mastery of forensic rhetoric was second to none, according to the younger Pliny (*Ep.* 2.11.17–18), and whose appreciation of tragic poetry (Greek as well as Latin) is indicated in his *Dialogus* (11–12) through the persona of the orator and tragic playwright Curiatius Maternus. As we shall argue in the first chapter of this book, Tacitus' word patterns and poetic imagery suggest that in introducing the Julio-Claudians to his readers at *Annales* 1.3–11, the historian has drawn upon Attic tragedy as a point of departure. Whether such inspiration derived from the historian's study of rhetoric or from his perusal of the Greek originals cannot be determined for certain; nevertheless, the apparent verbal correlations are worth noting if only to acknowledge the importance of Greek tragic prototypes in Roman rhetoric in general and in the historiography of the *Annales* in particular.

Greek literature, both poetry and prose, was fundamental to Roman rhetoric (and participation in public life), both in the republic, when Cicero and Caesar, among others,<sup>18</sup> studied with Greek teachers, and in the empire, when Pliny, Suetonius, and other men of liberal education did the same.<sup>19</sup> Attic tragedy featured prominently among these studies. Even if actual performances of Greek tragedies were few and far between,<sup>20</sup> the vocabulary and imagery of the original texts lived on through rhetoric. According to

Cicero, in fact, tragic poetry held such a close consanguinity to oratory that one had to be thoroughly familiar with the contrasting styles not only of the great Roman playwrights, Ennius, Pacuvius, and Accius, but also of the greatest of the Greeks, Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides (*De Orat.* 3.27).<sup>21</sup> Although Cicero, in *De Finibus*, remarks that Greek tragedies had been translated word for word into Latin (*ad verbum* [1.4]), he also complains of what he implies is an entire class of literary elitists who insist upon reading them in the original Greek (so 1.1), a situation that persisted in the empire, when knowledge of that language was an asset for a career in public life, since so many promagisterial posts were in Greek-speaking provinces.<sup>22</sup>

Just as Horace endorses the assiduous study of Greek models for promising poets (*Ars Poet.* 268–74),<sup>23</sup> so Quintilian urges the diligent perusal of Attic playwrights, both comic and tragic, by aspiring orators (*Inst. Orat.* 10.1.65–68). Like Cicero (*De Orat.* 3.27), the rhetorician of the Flavian era recommends the tragic poets Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides as models for all those who aspire to rhetorical excellence, especially for the development of vocabulary imbued with *gravitas* (*Inst.* 1.8.8; cf. *Inst.* 10.1.66–68). Quintilian especially singles out the benefits to be gleaned from the study of each tragedian. For instance, he notes that Aeschylus' style is *sublimis et gravis et grandiloquus*; Sophocles' is *sublimior*; and Euripides' is especially valuable for attorneys pleading in court, a fact that was not lost on Cicero, whose forensic speeches contain apparent allusions to Euripides (as well as Aeschylus).<sup>24</sup> Tacitus, who according to Pliny argued *σεμνῶς*—gravely, solemnly, and majestically—in the courts (*Ep.* 2.11.17), may well have garnered some of his rhetorical techniques from the study of such Greek tragic models, of which, it will be demonstrated, there are discernible traces in the recurrent vocabulary and thematic imagery of the *Annales*.<sup>25</sup>

Tacitus' excellence in rhetoric presumes that, like his well-educated contemporaries, he had received a proper grammatical education. That this consisted of a thorough knowledge of Greek language and literature can be inferred from the remarks of Quintilian and the younger Pliny. The former expressly recommends that young boys begin their education with Greek schoolmasters prior to studying with Latin *grammatici* (*Inst. Orat.* 1.4.1). And all of this was to occur even before they had commenced their higher education of rhetoric and philosophy.<sup>26</sup> Pliny, who was a self-confessed emulator of Cicero, demonstrates that he had certainly benefited from an early instruction in the language of Hellas, since he was able to compose a Greek tragedy at the age of fourteen (*quin etiam quattuordecim natus annos Graecam tragoediam scripsi* [*Ep.* 7.4.2]).<sup>27</sup> Although Sherwin-White speculates that the budding playwright may have used Seneca as a model,<sup>28</sup> there is no evidence for

this, and Pliny's subsequent remarks, with which he characterizes his precocious effort as a clumsy work, suggest the possibility that his tragedy might have been an exercise done with a Greek *grammaticus*. Furthermore, even if the young Pliny had written in Latin, he is demonstrably proficient enough in Greek to have worked from an Attic model.<sup>29</sup>

The object of a Greek education for young Romans who aspired to a career in public life was not only proficiency in reading "canonic literary texts"<sup>30</sup> but also being able to translate them easily from Greek into Latin and then back again into Greek. Cicero was certainly capable of doing so, as his *Tusculan Disputations*—which contain his own copious Latin renditions of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, as well as Aristophanes, Plato, Solon, Simonides, and Homer—suggest.<sup>31</sup> Such exercises were apparently fundamental to the study of Roman rhetoric both in the republic and in the empire.<sup>32</sup> For instance, Pliny advises Pedanius Fuscus Salinator, a forensic orator and future consul,<sup>33</sup> to undertake a two-way translation drill in order to acquire a stockpile of metaphors (*copia figurarum*) and to develop precision in meaning, vividness of vocabulary (*proprietas splendorque verborum*), and vitality in narrative (*vis explicandi* [Ep. 7.9.2]). In addition, such practice was designed not only to enable the student to catch any details that he might have missed upon a casual reading, but also to facilitate the development of originality in amplification through the emulation of the very best writers of the past (*praeterea imitatione optimorum similia inveniendi facultas paratur* [Ep. 7.9.2]). Adeptness and ease in theme and variation were also essential for the ancient historiographer—especially the writer of Roman history, a genre, according to Pliny, that was considered thin when compared to Greek history, which employed mimetic techniques from other literary genres, including tragedy.<sup>34</sup> In other words, Roman historians, in Pliny's estimation, needed to adorn the bare bones of historical facts—as the Greeks did—in order to provide their readers with a "seamless narrative."<sup>35</sup> Tragedy provided one vehicle for such rhetorical embellishment.

Since both Cicero and Quintilian recommend the diligent study of the vocabulary of Attic tragedians, we might reasonably assume not only that the works of the Greeks were widely available to be read but also that Roman students of rhetoric were capable of reading them in the original language. Moreover, Quintilian's remarks indicate that he fully expected his advice to be taken by those young men who aspired to the highest levels of eloquence. The rhetorician's observations therefore suggest both an author, and, moreover, an audience who would appreciate such rhetorical subtleties.<sup>36</sup> A. Gellius, who lived and wrote *Noctes Atticae* a generation after Tacitus, provides an example of the average Roman of the educated classes;

he studied rhetoric in Rome, then went to Athens for further instruction, and finally returned to the city on the Tiber and became a *iudex*. Although his work has been dismissed as second rate—an assessment that seems to be based upon notions of the inferiority of the Silver Age Latin literature to that of the Golden Age, such an idea was not shared in the ancient world, since, it has been noted, Augustine (a connoisseur of Cicero) judged Gellius to be a *vir elegantissimi eloquii et facundae scientiae* (*Civ. Dei* 9.4).<sup>37</sup> Aulus Gellius' very lack of distinction, however (even though he seems to have been admitted into the circle of Hadrian), emphasizes the rhetorical awareness during the second century of men who served in public life—men who were likely to be counted among Tacitus' readers, according to Rutledge.<sup>38</sup> For instance, even though Gellius (who was thoroughly familiar with Cicero and Vergil) has been censured for taking his “material at second hand,” resorting to “obscure” and “obsolete words,” and (the horror) citing “writers of the ante-classical period,”<sup>39</sup> he not only quotes excerpts from Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides in Greek, but he is also thoroughly cognizant of the semantics of the Greek originals in respect to the Latin versions of the tragedies. For example, in discussing Ennius' *Hecuba*, Gellius contrasts it to Euripides' original (quoting from both versions of Hecabe's speech to Odysseus); furthermore, in a snippet of literary criticism (secondhand or not) the raconteur notes that Ennius' words *ignobiles* and *opulenti* do not recover the power of Euripides' ἀδοξούντων and δοκούντων (*Noct. Att.* 11.4.2–4). Whether or not Aulus Gellius might be due for a reevaluation, he is, nevertheless, representative of educated Romans (of the sort noted by Rutledge) who might have constituted Tacitus' readership.

Allowing for the fact that Pliny is showing off his own erudition in his correspondence, which was finely honed for publication,<sup>40</sup> we can nevertheless presume that Greek literature was widely read and appreciated among contemporary members of the upper classes—again, those who would presumably be reading Tacitus' *Annales*. Pliny, for instance, peppers his letters with exact quotations—*untranslated*—not only from the works of Euripides but also from those of Homer, Hesiod, Aristophanes, Eupolis, and Thucydides and with copious excerpts from Aeschines and Demosthenes.<sup>41</sup> Prominent among Pliny's purported correspondents was Cornelius Tacitus, whose epistle Pliny laces with quotations—in Greek—from Homer (*Ep.* 1.20.22) and Euripides (*Ep.* 1.20.16), as well as the comic poets Eupolis (*Ep.* 1.20.17) and Aristophanes (*Ep.* 1.20.19). In other words, Pliny's letter to Tacitus assumes that the latter was thoroughly au courant not only with the language but also with the subtle intricacies of Greek (and Roman) literature. For example, Pliny discusses the brevity of Lysias (as well as that of the brothers Gracchi), as opposed to

the (preferred) prolixity of Demosthenes, Aeschines, and Hyperides (and Cicero) (*Ep.* 1.20.4). There is, therefore, no reason to suppose that Tacitus, like his well-read contemporaries, was not thoroughly educated in Greek as well as Roman literature. Nor are there any grounds to assume that Tacitus' education in rhetoric was inferior to that of Pliny, whom Syme considers to have led a sort of parallel political life to that of the historian.<sup>42</sup>

There seems to be little problem in accepting that the readers of Catullus, Vergil, and Ovid would recognize the poets' respective nods to their Greek literary predecessors. One might, for example, presume that Catullus' lectors (or at least a good number of them) reading *Ille mi par esse deo videtur* (51) might readily turn their minds to Sappho's φαίνεται μοι κήνος ἴσος θεοῖσιν . . . or, in respect to some of the poet's more subtle allusions, might nevertheless recognize the many parallelisms with Homer, Hesiod, Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides.<sup>43</sup> The same observation might reasonably be applied to the readers of Vergil, whose *Eclogues* are informed by Theocritus and whose *Aeneid* is illuminated by Homer as well as Attic tragedy.<sup>44</sup> Similarly Ovid, in his *Metamorphoses*, relies on his readers' textual memories not only of his elegiac Roman predecessors but also of tragedy and epic in general and the narrative style of Callimachus in particular.<sup>45</sup> Such "negotiations between texts" were intended not merely as authorial annotations but were instead aimed at the reader, who, the poet fully expected, would appreciate them.<sup>46</sup>

Since the readers of Roman poets were likely from the same educated class as those who perused Livy and later Tacitus,<sup>47</sup> we might suppose that the latter's readers were just as capable of recognizing and appreciating poetic allusion as were those from a former age. Tacitus' own era constituted a "renaissance" of all manner of literary experimentation, according to Syme.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, ancient audiences, whether of theatrical presentations or of recitations of declamation, poetry, and oratory, were thoroughly appreciative of the nuances not only of genre and theme but also of the vocabulary and imagery of a particular author.<sup>49</sup> The same proposition is true for the readers of the works of Roman historians—themselves highly trained in the art of rhetoric—readers who would likely be both familiar with and cognizant of literary reminiscences.<sup>50</sup> The "expectations and knowledge of the conventions of narrative" would therefore enhance the enjoyment of Tacitus' lectors, who would not be reading the *Annales* in a "literary vacuum," as it were. On the contrary, a "single allusion, even a single word, could tap a whole complex of ideas in the mind of the audience or reader."<sup>51</sup> It will be argued in chapters 1 and 2 of this book that Tacitus utilizes his recurrent vocabulary and imagery to recall the lexical techniques of tragic poetry—Attic as well as Roman.

Tacitus' appreciation of tragic techniques very likely derives from his own preparation in rhetoric. Although little is known about the historian's life, some inferences about his rhetorical training can be extrapolated from his works. By his own admission, he had learned dramatic methods from his careful observation of great orators and tragic playwrights in action (*Dial.* 1.2).<sup>52</sup> For instance, the young orator and future historian confesses to being particularly impressed by Curiatius Maternus' dramatic reading of his tragedy *Cato*, a work that Tacitus informs us (through the persona of Maternus) was apparently written in the literary tradition of Ovid's *Medea* and Varius' *Thyestes*.<sup>53</sup> And although the argument of the *Dialogus* would lead one to believe that poetry and oratory were separated by a sharp divide,<sup>54</sup> the remarks of Cicero and Quintilian suggest that Tacitus, in framing his debate over the merits of the two disciplines, has set up a straw man.<sup>55</sup> At any rate, mention—again in the words of Maternus—of the Attic tragedians Euripides and Sophocles (and the poet Homer) as well as the Attic orators Lysias<sup>56</sup> and Hyperides is a further indication that the outstanding works of the Greeks were very familiar to Tacitus, whose historiography reflects both epic and tragic poetry.<sup>57</sup>

The popularity of tragedy in Tacitus' day should not be underestimated.<sup>58</sup> The historian had access to Roman adaptations of the Greek tragedies, including the works of Pacuvius, Accius, and Ennius from the era of the republic and, from the empire, those of L. Varius Rufus, Mamercus Aemilius Scaurus, Curiatius Maternus, and Pomponius Secundus, as well as Ovid and Seneca.<sup>59</sup> The availability of the Greek originals and their influence on Tacitus' historiography, however, should not be dismissed, especially in light of the evidence of Cicero, Quintilian, and Pliny (and even A. Gellius). Moreover, drama was apparently an accustomed medium for celebrating the significant events of Rome's past.<sup>60</sup> Therefore, it should not be surprising to discover evocations of the theater in the diction of Roman historiography, and indeed, reminiscences of Attic tragedy have been discerned in Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita*.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, the framing of history according to a tragic perspective has its precedents in the historiography of Thucydides, who is said to have been influenced by a tragic moral consciousness stemming both from his contemporary Athenian playwrights and from his own observations of the twenty-seven-year Peloponnesian War.<sup>62</sup>

Thucydides' tragic vision has been "often misunderstood" ever since Cornford first suggested that the Attic historian—so preoccupied by the dark side of human nature—was deliberately evoking Athenian tragedy in portraying the monumental conflict of his era.<sup>63</sup> Such an interpretation apparently threatens to topple Thucydides from his pedestal as a "scientific"

historian and to suggest that he might have been less than truthful. Similar objections might also be raised in respect to Tacitus and a tragic portrayal of the Julio-Claudian dynasty in the *Annales*; and yet, as Woodman has observed, Roman history cannot be separated from rhetoric; it does not, and was never intended to, represent a precise replica of the “facts.”<sup>64</sup>

Tragedy and history were didactic.<sup>65</sup> Both dealt with universal moral truths, which remained essentially unaltered even though their details might be manipulated.<sup>66</sup> In drawing upon the mimetic world of tragedy as a framework for his historiography, Tacitus is not necessarily falsifying the facts. By rearranging them, however, and imposing a tragic unity on the random events of the lengthy Julio-Claudian reign, he emphasizes certain occurrences and diminishes the importance of others. He is therefore adroitly able to vacate the responsibility for any distortions that might be read into the narrative and to leave such interpretations to the discretion of his readers, a ploy to which he resorts on many occasions and in various ways throughout the *Annales*.<sup>67</sup>

Tragedy, in fact, is a medium with a message that is overt and at the same time, paradoxically, subliminal. It has its own language, its unique “categories of thought, types of reasoning, . . . system of representations,” and “beliefs and values” to be decoded and interpreted.<sup>68</sup> In presenting such hidden agendas, the tragic playwright created a mimetic “world of fiction, alongside of the world of reality.”<sup>69</sup> According to Löfstedt, Tacitus has presented his readers with a “series of tragedies,” which taken together comprised “the great tragedy of Rome.”<sup>70</sup> With his recurrent thematic vocabulary and imagery, Tacitus has likewise created a parallel tragic universe to Julio-Claudian Rome in order to make his historical narrative more enjoyable and accessible to his readers and to endow it with the authority of a familiar, even if only a virtual, reality.<sup>71</sup>

Since the great nineteenth-century studies of Wölfflin and Draeger,<sup>72</sup> Tacitus' vocabulary in the *Annales* has not received the extensive attention that it deserves. A reason for the oversight is, perhaps, the magnitude and the complexity of the historian's diction, which, unlike that of Livy or Velleius, refuses to be reduced to compact formulas.<sup>73</sup> Where Sörbom's volume, *Variatio Sermonis*, is exhaustive, it is syntactically oriented, and it offers little commentary on or analysis of Tacitus' semantic differentiation and coloring.<sup>74</sup> Even Syme's massive compendium avoids the topic by relegating Tacitus' vocabulary to long lists in appendixes.<sup>75</sup> Some of Syme's inventories, furthermore, focus on words *not* found in Tacitus, rather than those that are, and he confines his discussion of the historian's use of verbal repetition to one terse—and on-target—sentence: “A single word will be repeated with

deadly effect.”<sup>76</sup> Unfortunately, Syme does not undertake the study of Tacitus’ recurrent thematic vocabulary with its semantic variations—the shifts in connotational value that render his lexical “effect” so “deadly.” Although there have been excellent studies on the employment and repetition of individual words,<sup>77</sup> groups of words,<sup>78</sup> and Tacitean verbal reminiscences of other authors and different literary genres,<sup>79</sup> there are still many areas within these categories that have gone untouched. Moreover, since tragedy has been deemed to be so fundamental to Tacitus’ historical narrative in the *Annales*,<sup>80</sup> his vocabulary with its polyvalent connotations ought to be thoroughly analyzed in respect to the genre that relies so conspicuously upon recurrent diction and connotative multiplicity.<sup>81</sup>

Löfstedt notes that Tacitus’ vocabulary and imagery are at their “most poetical” in the *Annales*.<sup>82</sup> The purpose of poetic language, according to Segal, is “to connect imaginatively” and to provide a “texture of words” that “is more important than or as important as the abstract lexical meanings” in which “connotations [are] as central as the denotations.”<sup>83</sup> Tacitus’ elevated style of prose and use of poetic constructions and vocabulary, in which a single word may assume many layers of significance,<sup>84</sup> are fundamental to the complexity of his diction.<sup>85</sup>

If there is a specific representative metaphor that emerges in this study of Tacitus’ diction, it is the transgression of boundaries—not only physical and moral but also connotative. With this in mind and in an endeavor to confront the challenge of treating a subject as vast and complex as Tacitus’ choice of words effectively, we have systematized the material, dividing it into three sections. The first is entitled Connotations (chaps. 1 and 2); the second, Transgressions (chaps. 3 and 4), and the third, Boundaries (chap. 5).

The first chapter calls attention to the complex network of thematic vocabulary that Tacitus embeds in chapters 3 to 11 of book 1—a lexical system that is analogous to prototypes in Greek tragedy. In this chapter, we also contrast Tacitus’ verbal stratagems to the techniques of repetition employed by Sallust and Livy, especially scrutinizing the latter historian’s methods in a scene from *Ab Urbe Condita* that Ogilvie has singled out for its apparent allusions to Attic tragedy.<sup>86</sup> Applying analogous criteria from the Livian episode, we then focus on Tacitus’ opening chapters for indications of similar emulation or reminiscence that might owe a rhetorical debt to the Attic playwrights, and we also offer a hypothesis as to why the historian might have framed his crucial opening chapters in such a manner.

Still focusing on Tacitus’ tragic poetics, the second chapter turns to the historian’s repetition not merely of single words but of entire clusters of

paronomasic vocabulary from specific lexical fields that replicate major categories of Aristotle's poetics of tragedy. Then demonstrating how Tacitus employs these verbal clusters, which he reserves for especially emotive scenes, we compare this rhetorical stratagem to analogous techniques found both in Attic tragedy and in the dramas of Seneca. The employment of such recurrent lexical amalgamations intensifies Tacitus' dramatic effect by imbuing the entire historical narrative of the *Annales* with a tragic texture and depth of field.

From the blurring of connotative boundaries, part two turns to the transgression of moral limits, concentrating on the proleptic expression, *muliebris impotentia*, introduced in book 1 and reprised in book 12. A common denominator between Tacitus and Livy, *muliebris impotentia*, it will be argued, is informed by tragic prototypes, both Greek and Roman. Embracing a remarkably expansive and flexible range of nuances, *muliebris impotentia* connotes female appropriation of legitimate male prerogatives, including political power and the art of eloquence; the expression, as Tacitus employs it, also embraces the rhetorically related transgressions of adultery, poisoning, seduction, and magic. Whereas chapter 3 focuses on female usurpation, chapter 4, which demonstrates how Tacitus mixes and matches specific recurrent clusters of his tragic poetics as a narrative undercurrent whenever murder is incipient, concentrates on poison and seductive magic.

Part three, Boundaries, consists of only one chapter. This explores what in a theatrical genre would essentially constitute the stagecraft of Tacitus, who exploits the trope of boundary violation as a metatheatrical metaphor of neo-Stoicism, as formulated in Seneca's *Quaestiones Naturales* and utilized in the dramas of the playwright-philosopher, who plays a leading part in the *Annales'* Neronian episodes. From metatheatrical neo-Stoicism, the chapter shifts to the specific settings within which Tacitus' Julio-Claudian antagonists interact: the *domus*, the *hortus*, and the *theatrum*. Although they are hardly noticeable at first, these locations become more detailed and identifiable as theatrical settings as the narrative progresses. As Tacitus converts his tragic settings from the intangible to the substantial, so he subjects his proleptic verbal clusters—insinuated darkly at the beginning of the narrative—to a metamorphosis from which they emerge with luminous transparency, demonstrating an underlying synchronism to the disparate events of his lengthy narrative.

By elucidating several of Tacitus' verbal methods that have been previously overlooked, this book seeks to call attention to the subtle lexical substructure of the *Annales*, which not only transmits the diverse elements of the historian's major themes but also conveys a subliminal tragic message to

his readers. Ever present, but hardly noticed, due to his artistry and the compelling nature of his subject, Tacitus' recurrent thematic vocabulary nevertheless deserves thorough consideration and should never be taken at face value.<sup>87</sup>